UNITED NATIONS **S**

Security Council

Distr.
GENERAL

S/1998/906
30 September 1998
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: ARABIC

LETTER DATED 30 SEPTEMBER 1998 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF IRAQ TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

On instructions from my Government, I have the honour to transmit to you herewith a letter dated 30 September 1998 from Mr. Tariq Aziz, Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq, concerning the statements made by former inspector Scott Ritter that were published in the Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz and the American newspaper The Washington Post in their issues for 29 September 1998.

I should be grateful if you would have this letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Nizar HAMDOON
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

98-28770 (E) 011098 011098

/...

Annex

Letter dated 30 September 1998 from the Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq addressed to the Secretary-General

The statements made by former inspector Scott Ritter to the Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz and in the article published by the American newspaper The Washington Post in their issues for 29 September 1998 (see appendix II) confirm certain egregious facts to which Iraq has long been calling attention in its statements and in its letters addressed to you and to the Security Council.

1. We have all along been calling attention to the fact that the Special Commission, which operates in the name of the Security Council and the United Nations with the outward appearance of implementing the relevant Security Council resolutions, maintains close links with the intelligence agencies of States that pursue policies that are inimical to Iraq and seek objectives that bear no relation to the resolutions of the Security Council and their stated goals, namely the United States and Israel. It is clear from the information now available that this linkage pertains to the following sensitive areas:

(a) A number of the officials of the Special Commission were nominated for recruitment by their governments. Effectively, their ties have continued to be to their governments, and this is true in particular of the Americans among them. Scott Ritter has not been the only one. All of those who occupy the sensitive positions in the Special Commission, and particularly that of Deputy Executive Chairman, are Americans with the same characteristics as Scott Ritter.

(b) When it seeks to lend credence to its mendacious allegations, to engage in open espionage against Iraq and to precipitate crises, the main sources of the information used by the Special Commission are the United States and Israel.

2. We have all along been warning that the working methods of the Special Commission are not those of a United Nations body. The Special Commission behaves like an intelligence agency and not like a United Nations entity specializing in disarmament and disarmament-related monitoring. It is clear from the statements made by Scott Ritter that the Special Commission has not been content with information gathering alone but has also discussed its methods of operation in Iraq with United States and Israeli intelligence agencies. We have also always cautioned that, in the exercise of its functions, the Commission might be directly influenced by instructions given by the United States. The new information in question exposes this fact in a shameful manner.

3. We have always cautioned that the Special Commission, which is formally linked with the Security Council and with the Secretariat, should not operate in a unilateral manner and without regard for its duly authorized terms of reference.

Our assessment of the methods and intentions of the Special Commission and the Americans who work for it is confirmed by two factors in addition to the other considerations we have mentioned:

(a) The information that Scott Ritter was seeking and soliciting while carrying out inspections in Iraq was not information that had any connection with the disarmament requirements of resolution 687 (1991) but intelligence-related information concerning the Iraqi armed forces and the Iraqi national security agencies. I am sending you herewith a list of the kinds of information that he was seeking while carrying out inspections (see appendix I).

(b) Scott Ritter led or was a member of 28 inspection teams. In none of these inspections was it determined that any weapons or weapon components had been hidden at any of the 475 sites inspected. This belies the allegations of the Special Commission concerning the concealment of weapons, it confirms the mendacity of Scott Ritter and his like in the Special Commission, and it exposes the real objectives underlying their activities in Iraq and their false allegations.

As these facts show, the Special Commission has in reality become a dangerous entity whose present composition and practices threaten the very credibility and impartiality of the United Nations and the performance of its functions under the Charter.

These facts, revealed by the staff of the Special Commission itself, confirm the grounds of our complaints and fears that the real role of this entity has not been to monitor the implementation of Security Council resolutions but deliberately to perpetuate the embargo imposed on Iraq and to spy on the country. They confirm that Iraq was justified, truthful and accurate with regard to all the concerns it raised in connection with the Special Commission and in its objections to its conduct, allegations and pronouncements.

As a Member State of the United Nations, we seek lawful protection from an entity that operates in the name of the United Nations and the Security Council. In our letter of 5 August 1998 addressed to you (S/1998/718, annex), we identified a number of desiderata that would ensure a modicum of such protection. We further urge you to institute an official inquiry into the actions, behaviour and ties of the Special Commission in order to safeguard the credibility, impartiality and good reputation of the United Nations.

We call for a halt to the activities of the United States U-2 spy plane in Iraq, since it has now been confirmed that the information and imagery it obtains go to the United States and Israeli intelligence services for use in their schemes to threaten the security and sovereignty of Iraq. A French aircraft has now begun to be used for observation, and this may be adequate for the Special Commission's purposes.

(Signed) Tariq AZIZ
Deputy Prime Minister

Appendix I

Inspection procedures used by Scott Ritter in the inspections he undertook in Iraq

Taking the names of commanders and a number of officers from the commanders' board displayed at military unit headquarters, and examining their personal files.

Examining files relating to military exercises, particularly those of the Special Republican Guard, and to training programmes.

Examining maps relating to unit movements.

Examining the encipherment methods in use.

Examining telecommunications networks.

Examining correspondence in the files of security and intelligence officers.

Examining weapons emplacement files.

Examining order sequence and inter-unit liaison files.

Examining the duty files of military units entrusted with special tasks.

Identifying the functions of buildings at a particular site in accordance with maps drawn on the basis of intelligence sources (the U-2 spy plane, satellites and other sources).

Examining documents in the confidential section of the Iraqi intelligence service, at military intelligence and at the leadership's special protection unit.

Examining munitions stores and weapons racks.

Appendix II

Hide and seek with the palace guard / By David Makovsky

HA'ARETZ הארץ
English Edition Features

Tuesday, September 29, 1998

in Hebrew

Homepage
News
Economics
Editorial
Op-Ed
Features
Arts&Leisure
Sport
Books
Food
Letters
Cartoon
Weather

Currency Rates
T.A. Stock Exchange
Israeli Stocks on Wall St.

Previous Editions
About Ha'aretz
Write to Us
Reproduction Rights

IHT/Ha'aretz Hotel Service

Hide and seek with the palace guard

Former UN arms inspector Scott Ritter tells Ha'aretz that the UN inspectors had broken Iraq's code for hiding missiles - just before the inspections were stopped

By David Makovsky

NEW YORK - Scott Ritter knows Iraq pretty well by now. A veteran arms inspector for the United Nations Special Commission charged with tracking Iraq's arsenal of weapons of mass destruction, Ritter, who recently resigned his post, was intimately involved in the UN effort to keep Saddam Hussein honest.

Over an extended period, Ritter and other inspectors worked to break the code Saddam was using to issue instructions involving the movement of weapons Iraq wanted to keep hidden from inspectors. Well into this year, the cat and mouse game being played in Iraq made regular headlines around the world.

What few know is that the UN inspectors, with Israeli help, eventually broke the Iraqi code and were on the verge of a major breakthrough in uncovering concealed weaponry. Then, this summer, the inspections were halted. That's when Ritter quit his job - out of pure frustration, he says.

In this exclusive interview with Ha'aretz, Ritter reveals how weapons were being moved around in Iraq, what role Israel played in helping the inspections team, and his own personal disillusionment with the United States for what he characterizes as its lack of support for the inspections program, public hype to the contrary notwithstanding.

How did Iraq conceal weapons from UNSCOM?

/...

Hide and seek with the palace guard / By David Makovsky

"In April 1991, Saddam Hussein issued a presidential directive ordering that Iraq lie to the Special Commission [UNSCOM] and to the IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency], [and that Iraq] would keep [its mass destruction] capabilities.

"In May 1991, the materials that were kept were turned over under instruction of the president to the Special Security Organization (SSO) and Special Republican Guard (SRG). These are presidential security forces."

How big is this special organization?

"The SSO is one of the most secretive organizations in Iraq. It probably numbers around 5,000 people. The SRG is the military arm that had four brigades, around 15 battalions, and is about the size of a division - maybe 20,000 people."

Was the special organization set up for this purpose of concealment?

"The special organization was set up to protect the president of Iraq. Back in the 1980s this special security organization also had a responsibility for protecting Iraq's weapons... So they have been linked from the very beginning with these weapons, but today they have the responsibility of hiding them from the Special Commission."

Is their job basically to conduct one big shell game?

"That's right, it's a shell game. Now what you're getting to is the problem I faced. We were beating our heads against the wall going after the shell game. We're playing their game. I said to [then] chairman [of UNSCOM, Rolf Ekeus, that] rather than going after the shells, let's go after the man moving the shells.

"One reason why I went to Israel and started working with the Israelis is because I believe that the methodology that Israel uses to hunt down terrorists are the same methodologies we needed to use to go after the weapons of mass destruction. So I asked Israel to help the commission formulate analytical models, analytical techniques and to advise on operational issues."

Hide and seek with the palace guard / By David Makovsky

When was that?

"I first approached [Israel] in 1994. We started working in 1995."

Was it helpful?

"I can honestly say that if it weren't for Israel, the Special Commission would not have been able to carry out the anti-concealment effort."

What was Israel's unique contribution?

"I can just say Israel had a good reputation of being innovative, of being capable, of being good. And we approached Israel due to all those factors. It's Tel Aviv that can be hit by these missiles, not New York City, and we were actually, frankly speaking, a little dismayed with the lack of intensity, the lack of enthusiasm, that emanated from Washington on this issue. The U.S. treated it more as an academic exercise and I thought Israel treated it as it is - a matter of life and death. So we came to Israel."

Were your trips and cooperation with Israel authorized by the head of UNSCOM? Was it also approved by the U.S.?

"Ekeus started this, yes. It was all authorized by Ekeus. It was a totally authorized thing and it was approved by the U.S. government. Every aspect was approved by the U.S. government."

Who ran the Iraqi concealment program?

"Abed Hamid Mahmoud, the presidential secretary. He is probably the most powerful man in Iraq after the president. He is Saddam's bodyguard, confidant, right-hand man. Qusay Hussein [Saddam's son] cannot go the president without going through Abed Hamid Mahmoud. He is the gatekeeper. He is the man responsible for coordinating the national security policy of Iraq. He's the secret power in Iraq. He runs what's called the joint committee, [which] coordinates all the national security...

"He's the one who brings people in and gives them

Hide and seek with the palace guard / By David Makovsky

concealment tasks. He's the one who [manages] the concealment operation center that monitors all the stuff that is moved around Iraq. Abed uses the special security organization [SSO] as the tool for concealment.

"I can name officers within the special security organization who did conc..alment, and I can tell [the UNSCOM] chairman, how, when, where, and why specific acts of concealment took place. That's how good we got. I can't say how we did it. But I can say how good we got.

"So we started with nothing and in the end we were down to where we knew when, where, how, why, who and what was happening. A..d that's why the frustration. It was not a single source of information. We used everything that we had available to us. And that's why what happened in July and August [when the U.S. halted inspections] was so frustrating. Because now that we have identified how they're doing it, and now that we get the kind of information we need on the timely basis we need, we're inside their decision-making cycle. We're reacting before Iraq can react."

You really could get the information before they move the shell?

"Before they move the shell. And I got stuck. That's why I was so mad. Because I finally came up with the solution. I broke the code. We untied the Gordian knot. We figured it out. We had the problem solved and now we just need to go do the job. It took us three years, but we solved the problem.

"But the U.S. didn't let us. Not only didn't they let us, they won't let us - because to go do it ratchets it up to the ultimate level of confrontation. Because there's no way Iraq will allow us to inspect the people who need to be inspected. We're talking about the people closest to Saddam Hussein. We're talking about the security forces, the personal security forces of Saddam, we're talking about the family of Saddam. These are the people doing concealment.

"It basically works like a Mafia organization. When you organize crime [or set up a] terrorist organization, you have cells. And in order to become a cell leader,

Hide and seek with the palace guard / By David Makovsky

you have to be trusted by the family, so you have to be very close to the family. So the people being selected are direct blood relatives of Saddam. There are primarily Tikritis (people from Saddam's hometown) or there are alliances of marriage to other tribes, like the Alduries. People of this nature are also close to Saddam. Abed is the one who says I can trust this man or I can't. Abott does the interviews. That's all compartmentalized. [Even] if you get one cell, you don't what the other guy is doing.

"Now the cells can rely on a larger infrastructure, the Special Security Organization, the Special Republican Guard. These elite organizations are populated by people loyal to Saddam. Now they don't have a mission per se of concealment, but you if you need a truck, you can go to that Special Republican Guard and vehicle resources. If you need 15-man working party, you can go to that Special Republican Guard unit and get 15 soldiers to do something for you. So you have the resources of the SSO and SRG at your disposal to do you want to hide these weapons. You're given vehicles, you're given money, you're given a safe house. You're given the responsibility to go out and find a location to hide this stuff.

"A lot of people will go out the way it's known you to go to relatives. You go to your uncle who has a farm in Samara, and you say on that farm, 'I need to use that shed. I can't tell you what for, it's a family business.' Thirty days later, they leave and he has a soldier on his team. He asks: 'Do you have a relative near here?' They go to the cousin and say, 'We need to use your farm and hide stuff on your farm.' And that's how they move stuff around."

How many people do you think are involved?

"I think we are talking about hundreds of people involved. It is probably several cells doing chemicals, several cells doing ballistic missiles, several cells doing biological [components], and a cell doing nuclear [devices]. You might be talking 50, 60 sites in Iraq at any one time with all that. Then you have the groups responsible for monitoring... personnel, they you have a group responsible for monitoring UNSCOM - trying to collect intelligence on what UNSCOM is doing. This is significant operation.

Hide and seek with the palace guard / By David Makovsky

"And Iraq has this regime of terror and control. The thing about the joint committee is that they can tap into any resource in Iraq."

Did Israel help crack the code of concealment?

"We used the methodology that Israel was considered to be the best at in the world. We cracked the code, not Israel. Israel was not in the lead on this, but I can say that UNSCOM could not have solved this problem without the help of Israel. It's absolutely essential. We could not have done what we did. We couldn't even come close without the help of Israel.

"I was in charge when I went to Israel. Israel responded. My requirements and my tasking came from the executive chairman. Israel did not control the Special Commission. Israel didn't want to control the Special Commission. Israel was a fair player on all of this. It was extremely responsible."

Could you further characterize the relationship with Israel?

"I will leave it to the Israelis to do that."

Can you say how many times you were in Israel?

"I was there a lot. From 1994 until 1998 I was there a lot."

Can you comment on the FBI investigation into your links with Israel?

"It's the most outrageous that I ever encountered with the United States government. I was sent to the Special Commission by the U.S. government to work for the executive chairman. Those are my orders. So I did that. I was told that strength of the Special Commission would be in its independence, that the Special Commission could not be seen as a tool of any country and that I have to help make the Special Commission independent. I did that. I succeeded.

"In 1994, we need some new methodologies that we weren't getting from the United States, so we went to Israel.

Hide and seek with the palace guard / By David Makovsky

"I went to the executive chairman (Ekeus) and we raised the issue of approaching Israel, and he approved. I have to say that as an American citizen, I went to the U.S. government and told them that I was doing this and they didn't stop me. When the relationship really began in earnest starting in July of '95, everything I did in Israel was approved by the executive chairman. Everything we did was consistent with the mandate given by the [UN] Security Council. And everything I did was made known to and approved by the U.S. government."

Every step of the way?

"Every step of the way. Now they didn't agree with a lot of what I did. They didn't agree at all. They didn't like the idea of UNSCOM becoming this independent, nor UNSCOM having a capable partner like Israel supporting us. They weren't happy with this at all. They tried to stop it every step of the way. But I kept them informed. I had their approval and everything was approved by the executive chairman.

"That's why it just frustrates me they would consider that I was committing espionage. The bad guy here is Saddam. Israel was helping UNSCOM go after Iraq's prohibited capability. I didn't receive any money from Israel, I didn't receive any favor from Israel. I didn't receive squat from Israel. I got a shake of the hand, a pat on the back. The key thing is I was using Israel. Israel wasn't using me.

"Certain officials in the U.S. government are so narrow minded that they can't see that. Israel never made an offer of money, never made an attempt to pay me or influence me whatsoever. Ever.

"Yeah, we had friendly relations. They are some of the most professional people I ever met in my life. They are also great people, wonderful people. I count many of them as friends. I would hope in this future when this all calms down, there is a way that we can stay in touch as friends. But the relationship was purely a professional relationship."

Was it the CIA that instigated the FBI investigation?

Hide and seek with the palace guard / By David Makovsky

"The bottom line is that it was the CIA that raised the concerns. They said that the relationship that Israel and Ritter had could be an espionage relationship. Even though they knew all the facts and they approved everything. They turned it over to the FBI and the FBI ran with it and then it became sought of a self-continuing effort. Every time I went to Israel, the pile got thicker. Every time I did my job, the FBI just collected more data, saying its espionage. It was terrible."

When did the FBI investigation become known to you?

"I knew in January, February 1997 that the U.S. had a concern about the nature of the work and I worked very closely with the government to try and talk about what their concern was. And it came down to basically bureaucratic jealously. You know, I have a better relationship with the Israelis than they do. They are not in control. They lost control.

"I'm an American. Israel can't have an intelligence relationship with an American that is not controlled by the U.S. These are their concerns. I said basically if that's it, the 'tough luck. Because, you sent me here to work for a case. You told me to be independent. I'm doing what you told me to do, and I'm succeeding. So unless you give me a direct order to stop, and I'm always an American, you give me a direct order, you say stop, I will stop today. You ask me a question, I will answer it.'

"I'm not hiding anything from them. But they never said stop.

"I think they were concerned that I was providing Israel with classified U.S. information. Now that has been resolved. I think the CIA, after starting this ball rolling, realized they made a horrible mistake and they've actually put out an official ruling that said that Ritter never had a security clearance or didn't have a security clearance while he was working with UNSCOM. It is illegal for the U.S. to provide classified information to somebody who doesn't have a clearance. Therefore, any information provided by the United States to Ritter was unclassified. So Ritter could not have not have turned over classified information to Israel and that was the end of it. That should have closed it. It's not. And you

Hide and seek with the palace guard / By David Makovsky

have to ask the FBI why it is not closed today."

What can you say about the Israeli officials you met?

"First is the professionalism. The people I dealt with were dedicated, professional, smart. They worked their asses off. When you go down to Washington you are overwhelmed with the 9 to 5 mentality. There wasn't this 9 to 5 mentality. This was national security. Plus they think out of the box."

What does that mean 'to think out of the box?'

"In America, you have rules. We're going to address this problem. Let's read the rules here. They say we can think this, we cannot do this. That's how we are going to solve this. That's how we're going to do it.

"The Israelis are: 'What's another way of looking at this? How else can we do this? Let's think of alternatives here. Is there another way we can solve this problem?' The Israelis were innovative and courageous in terms of putting forward ideas. They were not afraid to have an idea shot down. Again, professional. A level of trust developed.

"The Israelis looked at me and didn't see a United Nations officials, or an American. It's all professional. It's somebody whom they can respect, whom can they can work with. That's what impressed me about them. And the fact that they were always sympathetic with the cause. I never once felt when I was over there that I was somehow imposing on them or somehow inconveniencing them. When I was over there, we were a team. We were all going for the same cause. We were working really hard. They are good people."

A view of what Iraq has

NEW YORK - Following is former UN arms inspector Scott Ritter's assessment of what weapons Iraq is currently hiding. He bases his assessment on data derived from various Iraqi documents in UNSCOM's possession and reports provided by reliable Iraqi defectors.

* Nuclear - Ritter notes that so long as Iraq does not have a fissionable core, it does not possess a nuclear bomb. At the same time, he believes Iraq has three implosion-type nuclear devices, which would become

Hide and seek with the palace guard / By David Makovsky

bombs once Iraq obtains the fissionable material.

* Chemical - A recent UNSCOM inspection of Air Force headquarters uncovered a document showing that Iraq overdeclared the number of bombs dropped and the tonnage of chemical agent used during the Iran-Iraq War. As a result, several thousand bombs and seven hundred tons of chemical agent that were listed as expended may well still be in Iraq's possession.

* Biological - There is evidence pointing to the possibility that Iraq tested biological weapons on live humans in 1995.

* Missiles - Iraq claims that it has never produced an operational ballistic missile, however UNSCOM believes that Iraq still has an operational ballistic missile force of between 5 and 12 al-Hussein missiles which were partially disassembled in 1997 and dispersed to various locations. They can be reassembled on short notice. Iraq is also believed to possess various components for some 25 additional missiles. Mobile missile launchers can easily be manufactured at any time.

© copyright 1998 Ha'aretz. All Rights Reserved

More Features

- Seven was Brick's lucky number/By Amos Harel
- The one day when no Jew is totally secular/By Shlomo Deshen
- Cut a deal, catch a plane/By Saguy Green
- "Computerized thinking is a big deal"/By Neora Shem-Shaul
- New on the Net
- When playing with a yo-yo means more than just playing with a toy/By Daphne Levy-Yanovich

Homepage | News | Economics | Editorial | Op-Ed | Features | Weather | Cartoon | Sport
Arts | Books | Food | Currency Rates | Tel-Aviv Stock Exchange | Israeli Stocks on Wall St.
Previous Editions | About Ha'aretz | Reproduction Rights | Write to Us

Appendix III

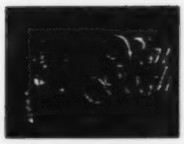
Israel Gave Key Help To U.N. Team in Iraq

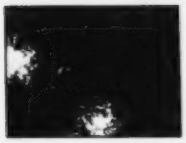
JCPenney
I LOVE YOUR STYLE
storewide FALL

JCPenney
Arizona Denim
I LOVE YOUR STYLE

Related Items
Print Edition
Today's National Articles
Inside "A" Section
Front Page Articles

On Our Site
Top
News Breaking News
Politics Section
National Section





Israel Gave Key Help To U.N. Team in Iraq

U-2 Photos Among Intelligence Shared

By Barton Gellman
Washington Post Staff Writer
Tuesday, September 29, 1998; Page A01

For more than four years, United Nations arms inspectors have obtained many of their best leads on forbidden Iraqi weapons through a secretive and diplomatically risky channel from the Israeli government, according to knowledgeable sources in the United States, Israel and the United Nations.

After a wary start born of Israel's long isolation at the world body, Israel began providing the U.N. Special Commission with increasingly detailed and sensitive intelligence on its Arab adversary, which launched 40 Scud missiles at Haifa and Tel Aviv during the 1991 Persian Gulf War. Among its most important contributions, from the U.N. panel's point of view, were significant leads on the existence of a biological weapons program and the first concrete evidence that Iraq had a systematic campaign of deception to conceal weapons programs it was legally obliged to declare and dismantle.

The two-way exchange of information, which included meetings with the director and deputy director of Israeli military intelligence, eventually involved Israeli analysis of aerial photography taken by American U-2 surveillance planes, provision of raw reports from defectors and other human sources, and Israeli processing of other forms of information obtained by the special commission, known as UNSCOM.

According to three officials with direct knowledge of the relationship, Israel had become by July 1995 the most important single contributor among the dozens of U.N. member states that have supplied information to UNSCOM since its creation in April 1991. The United States, by all

/...

accounts, remained a major supplier of information, as well as UNSCOM's most important material and political backer. But the arrival of fresh Israeli intelligence after most U.S. tips were exploited made for what one official called "this great big candy store of nice goodies."

There is no evidence that Israel directed UNSCOM's activity in any way, or that the U.N. panel gave information improperly or for Israel's national benefit. But Israel and UNSCOM have protected the operation among their most sensitive secrets, fearing that Iraq would use it to feed propaganda attacks that already featured accusations of a Zionist conspiracy behind the commission's work.

Even without evidence, those charges have resonated among intellectuals and in the government-controlled media in much of the Arab world, including pro-Western Persian Gulf states on which the American-backed U.N. panel has relied for practical and diplomatic support.

Ewen Buchanan, the spokesman for UNSCOM, said yesterday that the U.N. Security Council resolutions demanding Iraq's disarmament call upon all member states to assist the panel "in discharging its mandate," and more than 40 countries have "helped us in the form of experts, information, equipment, finance and in-kind help like laboratory analysis or helicopters."

"As a general principle," he added, "we will not confirm or deny our dealings with particular states."

Israel's U.N. ambassador, Dore Gold, consulted with superiors when asked about the cooperation. When he telephoned back, he said he could say only that "I cannot give any official Israeli response."

Those willing to speak about the relationship, from UNSCOM's point of view, said the commission had no choice but to seek assistance from foreign intelligence agencies once the extent of Iraq's concealment efforts became clear. Israel had the means and motive to assist the disarmament panel, they said, but other adversaries of Iraq -- including Iran and some neighboring Arab states -- did so as well.

"I think it's perfectly valid we had contact with the Israelis," said Tim Trevan, a Briton who until 1995 was political adviser to Rolf Ekeus, UNSCOM's executive

/...

chairman until last year. "There's nothing to be ashamed about with that contact."

Trevan, according to other sources, made the first chance link between the commission and the Jewish state. Ekeus had dispatched him to a January 1994 academic conference on disarmament in Delphi, Greece. There he sat in the audience as David Ivri, then director general of Israel's Defense Ministry, made disparaging comments about UNSCOM and hinted it was not finding all of Iraq's hidden weapon programs.

After Trevan stood up to criticize Ivri -- arguing that Israel should "put up or shut up," as one participant recalled -- another Israeli pulled him aside and introduced him to Brig. Gen. Yakov Amidror, who was then deputy director of Israel's Military Intelligence organization, known by its Hebrew acronym as Aman. Three months later, in April 1994, Amidror flew secretly to New York for a meeting with Ekeus, said sources with firsthand knowledge.

Scott Ritter, the U.N. inspector who resigned in protest last month, was a central conduit in the unfolding relationship, by his own account and those of others familiar with the details. Other UNSCOM staff members who traveled to the Aman headquarters in Tel Aviv's Kirya complex included Frenchman Didier Louis, German Norbert Reinecke and Russian Nikita Smidovich.

The Clinton administration, which was aware of the relationship in detail, generally supported Israel's aid to UNSCOM, but worried about the political difficulties that might be caused by public disclosure. Even so, the first public hint of the relationship came in a leak from the U.S. government aimed at discrediting Ritter, disclosing that he was under FBI investigation for his intelligence contacts with Israel.

Sources said that investigation remains open, and the FBI declined to comment. Current and former U.S. government officials at the policymaking level and current and former UNSCOM officials said, without dissent, that Ritter's exchange of information with Israel was approved by his superiors at the commission and, in principle, by the United States.

But some of those officials said there were concerns about Ritter's links with Israel that fell short of criminal

/...

suspicion. Ritter on several occasions brought canisters of U-2 film for processing in Israel, and from time to time allowed Israeli technicians to make copies, sources said.

There is apparently an unresolved legal question about the ownership of that U-2 imagery, which is normally classified secret in the United States. Washington had lent the aircraft and its product to UNSCOM. The imagery was stamped with the notation, "REL UNSCOM/IAEA ONLY," meaning that it could be released to the special commission and to the International Atomic Energy Agency. U.S. government sources said the CIA's general counsel wrote to the Justice Department, in the context of the Ritter investigation, that the release to UNSCOM was legally equivalent to declassification for purposes of U.S. espionage law.

Four independent sources with firsthand knowledge said that Ritter and his colleagues worked with the explicit consent of Ekeus, the Swedish diplomat who was UNSCOM's first executive chairman, and of Richard Butler, Ekeus's Australian successor. The U.N. panel was aware that Israel -- like other cooperating nations, not least the United States -- derived valuable military information from the relationship, but UNSCOM insisted it would provide only such information to Israel as would enable Israeli analysts to assist UNSCOM.

UNSCOM gave Israel U-2 photographs, for example, so that Israel could apply its own intelligence databases to the structures depicted, allowing the U.N. panel to combine information from many sources for a fuller picture. Those familiar with the relationship insist that UNSCOM never "traded" information in return for Israeli help. Still, the relationship eventually raised alarms among some in the U.S. government. Israel received so much American-shot imagery of Iraqi strategic facilities from UNSCOM, officials said, that the United States worried it could be held responsible in part if Israel used the pictures to select targets or flight routes for a strike on Iraq's nonconventional weapons.

There was no doubt that Israel had strong incentives. In 1981, as a French-built nuclear reactor neared completion, Israeli warplanes launched a preemptive strike to destroy the facility at Osirak. Nine years later, a few months before invading Kuwait, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein threatened publicly to "burn half of Israel" in what was

/...

taken to be a reference to chemical weapons.

Asked whether his cooperation with Israel validated long-standing Iraqi charges that he was an agent of Israeli intelligence, Ritter said he was not "America's spy or Israel's spy or anyone else's spy," but an inspector working on explicit authority of his superiors.

"That's a diversion," Ritter said. "It's typical Iraqi tactics. The commission wouldn't have had to undertake these extraordinary measures if Iraq had been forthcoming."

The commission went to Israel, he said, because it was not getting as much help as it wanted from Washington and London on the most sensitive forms of information-gathering and was looking for another source "with an open mind, with a proven track record of success."

In September 1994, Israel gave UNSCOM its first major contribution -- a detailed allegation that the Special Security Organization, run by Saddam Hussein's younger son Qusay, was organizing the deception and concealment operation. The tip included physical descriptions of trucks and depots used to move forbidden materials and documents around the country, sources said.

Later, Israeli information helped provide what sources described as a key to unlocking a biological weapons program Iraq had long denied: Israel passed along the tip that Oxoid, a company in Basingstoke, England, had sold Iraq 40 tons of a biological growth medium that the Baghdad government could not account for.

In October and December 1994, Ritter led delegations to Tel Aviv for a meeting with Maj. Gen. Uri Saguy, then the chief of Israeli military intelligence, and panels of analysts from other Israeli agencies.

Thereafter, Saguy dispatched analysts on a regular basis to New York for meetings with Ritter and his colleagues in hotel basements and out-of-the-way bars. Sometimes Amidror, Saguy's deputy, traveled personally.

© Copyright 1998 The Washington Post Company